

Amendments to the Claims

Please amend Claims 26, 48 and 51. The Claim Listing below will replace all prior versions of the claims in the application:

Claim Listing

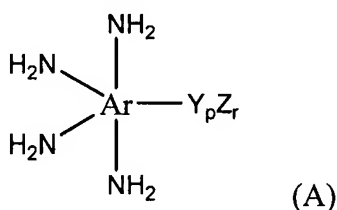
1-25. (Cancelled)

26. (Currently Amended) A proton-conducting polymer membrane which comprises polyazoles containing sulfonic acid groups and is obtainable by a process comprising the steps:

- A) mixing one or more aromatic or heteroaromatic tetraamino compounds with one or more aromatic or heteroaromatic carboxylic acids or derivatives thereof which contain at least two acid groups per carboxylic acid monomer, with at least part of the tetraamino compounds or the carboxylic acids comprising at least one sulfonic acid group, in polyphosphoric acid to form a solution or dispersion[[,]] ; or mixing of one or more aromatic or heteroaromatic diaminocarboxylic acids, of which at least part comprises sulfonic acid groups, in polyphosphoric acid to form a solution or dispersion;
- B) ~~optionally~~ heating the solution or dispersion obtained according to step A) under inert gas to temperatures of up to 325°C to form polyazole polymers; and
- C) applying a layer using the mixture from step B) to a support, thus forming a membrane on the support; or
- D) applying the solution or dispersion from step A) to a support, thus forming a membrane on the support; and
- E) heating the membrane formed in step D) under inert gas to temperatures of up to 325°C to form polyazole polymers; and

F) partially hydrolyzing the polyphosphoric acid moieties of the membrane from step C) or step E) until the membrane is self-supporting.

27. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the mixture prepared in step A) comprises aromatic or heteroaromatic tetraamino compounds of the formula (A):

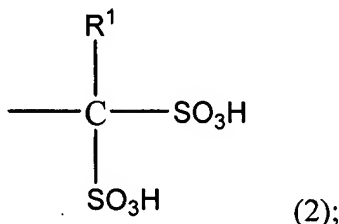


wherein

- Ar is an aromatic or heteroaromatic group;
 Y is a bond or a group having from 1 to 20 carbon atoms;
 p is an integer from 1 to 4 and represents the number of bonds or groups Y via which the group Z is bound to the group Ar;
 r is an integer from 1 to 4 and represents the number of groups Z which are bound to the group Y or, if Y is a bond, to the aromatic or heteroaromatic group Ar; and
 Z is a group of the general formula (1):

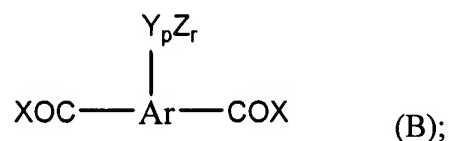


or the general formula (2):



wherein R¹ is a hydrogen atom or a group having from 1 to 20 carbon atoms.

28. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the mixture prepared in step A) comprises aromatic or heteroaromatic carboxylic acids of the formula (B):

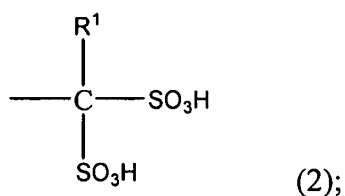


wherein

- Ar is an aromatic or heteroaromatic group;
- X is a halogen atom or a group of the formula OR^2 , where R^2 is a hydrogen atom or a group having from 1 to 20 carbon atoms;
- Y is a bond or a group having from 1 to 20 carbon atoms;
- p is an integer from 1 to 4 and represents the number of bonds or groups Y via which the group Z is bound to the group Ar;
- r is an integer from 1 to 4 and represents the number of groups Z which are bound to the group Y or, if Y is a bond, to the aromatic or heteroaromatic group Ar; and
- Z is a group of the general formula (1):



or the general formula (2):



wherein R^1 is a hydrogen atom or a group having from 1 to 20 carbon atoms.

29. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the mixture prepared in step A) comprises aromatic or heteroaromatic tetraamino compounds which contain no sulfonic acid groups and aromatic or heteroaromatic carboxylic acids which contain at least one sulfonic acid group.

30. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the mixture prepared in step A) comprises 3,3',4,4'-tetraaminobiphenyl, 2,3,5,6-tetraaminopyridine, or 1,2,4,5-tetraaminobenzene.
31. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the mixture prepared in step A) comprises: isophthalic acid; terephthalic acid; phthalic acid; 5-hydroxyisophthalic acid; 4-hydroxyisophthalic acid; 2-hydroxyterephthalic acid; 5-aminoisophthalic acid; 5-N,N-dimethylaminoisophthalic acid; 5-N,N-diethylaminoisophthalic acid; 2,5-dihydroxyterephthalic acid; 2,5-dihydroxyisophthalic acid; 2,3-dihydroxyisophthalic acid; 2,3-dihydroxyphthalic acid; 2,4-dihydroxyphthalic acid; 3,4-dihydroxyphthalic acid; 3-fluorophthalic acid; 5-fluoroisophthalic acid; 2-fluoroterephthalic acid; tetrafluorophthalic acid; tetrafluoroisophthalic acid; tetrafluoroterephthalic acid; 1,4-naphthalenedicarboxylic acid 1,5-naphthalenedicarboxylic acid 2,6-naphthalenedicarboxylic acid 2,7-naphthalenedicarboxylic acid diphenic acid 1,8-dihydroxynaphthalene-3,6-dicarboxylic acid bis(4-carboxyphenyl) ether benzophenone-4,4'-dicarboxylic acid bis(4-dicarboxyphenyl) sulfone; biphenyl-4,4'-dicarboxylic acid; 4-trifluoromethylphthalic acid; 2,2-bis(4-carboxyphenyl)hexafluoropropane; 4,4'-stilbenedicarboxylic acid; 4-carboxycinnamic acid; or their C₁-C₂₀-alkyl esters or C₅-C₁₂-aryl esters, or their acid anhydrides or acid chlorides.
32. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the mixture prepared in step A) comprises 2,3-diamino-5-carboxyphenylsulfonic acid, 2,3-diamino-6-carboxyphenylsulfonic acid, and 3,4-diamino-6-carboxyphenylsulfonic acid.
33. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the mixture prepared in step A) comprises aromatic tricarboxylic acids, their C₁-C₂₀-alkyl esters or C₅-C₁₂-aryl esters or their acid anhydrides or their acid halides or

tetracarboxylic acids, their C₁-C₂₀-alkyl esters or C₅-C₁₂-aryl esters or their acid anhydrides or their acid halides.

34. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 33, characterized in that the mixture prepared in step A) comprises 1,3,5-benzenetricarboxylic acid (trimesic acid); 2,4,5-benzenetricarboxylic acid (trimellitic acid); (2-carboxyphenyl)iminodiacetic acid, 3,5,3'-biphenyltricarboxylic acid; 3,5,4'-biphenyltricarboxylic acid; 2,4,6-pyridinetricarboxylic acid; benzene-1,2,4,5-tetracarboxylic acid; naphthalene-1,4,5,8-tetracarboxylic acid; 3,5,3',5'-biphenyltetracarboxylic acid; benzophenonetetracarboxylic acid; 3,3',4,4'-biphenyltetracarboxylic acid; 2,2',3,3'-biphenyltetracarboxylic acid; or 1,2,5,6-naphthalenetetracarboxylic acid.
35. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 33, characterized in that the content of tricarboxylic acid or tetracarboxylic acids is in the range of from 0 to 30 mol% based on dicarboxylic acid used.
36. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 35, characterized in that the content of tricarboxylic acid or tetracarboxylic acids is in the range of from 0.1 to 20 mol% based on dicarboxylic acid used.
37. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 36, characterized in that the content of tricarboxylic acid or tetracarboxylic acids is in the range of from 0.5 to 10 mol% based on dicarboxylic acid used.
38. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the mixture prepared in step A) comprises heteroaromatic dicarboxylic acids, tricarboxylic acids or tetracarboxylic acids which contain at least one nitrogen, oxygen, sulfur, or phosphorus atom in the aromatics.
39. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 38, characterized in that the mixture prepared in step A) comprises pyridine-2,5-dicarboxylic acid; pyridine-3,5-dicarboxylic acid; pyridine-2,6-dicarboxylic acid; pyridine-2,4-dicarboxylic

acid; 4-phenyl-2,5-pyridinedicarboxylic acid; 3,5-pyrazoledicarboxylic acid; 2,6-pyrimidinedicarboxylic acid; 2,5-pyrazinedicarboxylic acid; 2,4,6-pyridinetricarboxylic acid; benzimidazole-5,6-dicarboxylic acid; or their C₁-C₂₀-alkyl esters or C₅-C₁₂-aryl esters or their acid anhydrides or their acid chlorides are used.

40. (Previously Presented) The membrane as claimed in claim 26, characterized in that the mixture prepared in step A) comprises diaminobenzoic acid or its monohydrochloride and dihydrochloride salts.
41. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the heating according to step B) is carried out after the formation of a sheet-like structure according to step C).
42. (Previously Presented) The membrane as claimed in claim 26, characterized in that the solution produced in step A) or step B) further comprises dispersed or suspended polymer.
43. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the treatment according to step D) is carried out at temperatures in the range of from 0°C to 150°C in the presence of moisture.
44. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the treatment of the membrane in step D) is carried out from 10 seconds to 300 hours.
45. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the membrane formed after step D) is crosslinked by action of oxygen.
46. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that a layer having a thickness of from 20 to 4000 µm is produced in step C).
47. (Previously Presented) The membrane of Claim 26, characterized in that the membrane formed after step D) has a thickness of from 15 to 3000 µm.

48. (Currently Amended) An electrode having a proton-conducting polymer coating which is based on polyazoles and is obtainable by a process comprising the steps:
- A) mixing one or more aromatic or heteroaromatic tetraamino compounds with one or more aromatic or heteroaromatic carboxylic acids or derivatives thereof which contain at least two acid groups per carboxylic acid monomer, with at least part of the tetraamino compounds or the carboxylic acids comprising at least one sulfonic acid group, in polyphosphoric acid to form a solution or dispersion[[,]] ; or mixing of one or more aromatic or heteroaromatic diaminocarboxylic acids, of which at least part comprises sulfonic acid groups, in polyphosphoric acid to form a solution or dispersion;
 - B) ~~optionally~~ heating the solution or dispersion obtained according to step A) under inert gas to temperatures of up to 350°C to form the polyazole polymer; and
 - C) applying a layer using the mixture from step B) to an electrode, thus forming a membrane on the electrode; or
 - D) applying the solution or dispersion from step A) to an electrode, thus forming a membrane on the electrode; and
 - E) heating the membrane formed in step D) under inert gas to temperatures of up to 325°C to form polyazole polymers; and
 - F) partially hydrolyzing the polyphosphoric acid moieties of the membrane from step C) or step E).
49. (Previously Presented) The electrode of Claim 48, wherein the coating has a thickness of from 2 to 3000 μm .
50. (Previously Presented) A membrane-electrode unit comprising at least one electrode and at least one membrane as claimed in Claim 26.

51. (Currently Amended) A membrane-electrode unit comprising at least one electrode having a proton-conducting polymer coating which is based on polyazoles and is prepared by the following steps:
- A) mixing one or more aromatic or heteroaromatic tetraamino compounds with one or more aromatic or heteroaromatic carboxylic acids or derivatives thereof which contain at least two acid groups per carboxylic acid monomer, with at least part of the tetraamino compounds or the carboxylic acids comprising at least one sulfonic acid group in polyphosphoric acid to form a solution or dispersion[[,]] ; or mixing of one or more aromatic or heteroaromatic diaminocarboxylic acids, of which at least part comprises sulfonic acid groups, in polyphosphoric acid to form a solution or dispersion;
 - B) ~~optionally~~ heating the solution or dispersion obtained according to step A) under inert gas to temperatures of up to 350°C to form the polyazole polymer;
 - C) applying a layer using the mixture from step B) to an electrode, thus forming a membrane on the electrode; or
 - D) applying the solution or dispersion from step A) to an electrode, thus forming a membrane on the electrode; and
 - E) heating the membrane formed in step D) under inert gas to temperatures of up to 325°C to form polyazole polymers; and
 - F) partially hydrolyzing the polyphosphoric acid moieties of the electrode membrane from step C) or step E) until the membrane is self-supporting, and partially hydrolyzing the polyphosphoric acid moieties of at least one membrane as claimed in Claim 26.
52. (Previously Presented) A fuel cell comprising one or more membrane-electrode units as claimed in Claim 51.